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Claremont McKenna College

**When Resistance is Not Enough:
The Role of Ecotage in Radical
Environmentalism**

SUBMITTED TO:

**CHAR MILLER
AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS**

BY

KRIS BROWN

FOR

**SENIOR THESIS
FALL/2010**

Acknowledgments

This thesis belongs to Steve Miranda. Thank you, Mr. Miranda. You showed all of this to me in the beginning.

Thank you, Brittany, for cheese (for everything), and for bringing me to Environmental Analysis. This thesis, no matter how strongly you disagree with it, is largely the result of your influence on me.

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“If opposition is not enough, we must resist. If resistance is not enough, we must subvert.” -Ed Abbey

Introduction

“John Muir said that if it ever came to a war between the races, he would side with the bears. That day has arrived.” - Dave Foreman

At our first meeting each and every Environmental Analysis thesis writer sat nervously and imagined how far ahead the other students were on their projects. Our communal advisor, thesis guru Char Miller, chose his words carefully – acknowledging and alleviating our sense of unpreparedness, and yet unmistakably shouting “mush!” at us, his team of sled dogs, while planting a firm motivational boot in our behinds. In addition to conveying the urgency with which we ought to get moving, he expressed to us the significance of our projects. His thesis, he informed us, had been instrumental in deciding his career (and life) path. Now inspired, we, the writers, then took turns presenting a two-minute description of our projects. When my turn came, I lied. I had changed my thesis about five minutes before I opened my mouth.

Nonetheless, I continued the charade for a couple weeks. Several of the other writers had approached me after our first meeting and commented enthusiastically that my project sounded truly interesting, and I suppose it was. I planned to extend an independent study project that I conducted in Nepal the semester before: an exploration of buried elements of environmentalism in religious tradition, to put it as briefly as possible. The independent study project had essentially been a treasure hunt, and I was interested, perhaps even captivated, by the topic while writing about it. But I had undeniably moved on. I continued to research and plan for my fake topic, knowing in some part of me that it was a legitimate project, but feeling in some much more important

part that I should be writing about something else. I knew that my thesis should feel much more vital to me; that it should encapsulate me, in a sense. My problem was identifying a topic that I loved. I couldn't find the right alternative, so I settled.

Then I broke. Interestingly, I was inspired by pessimism. The entirety of my environmental education has been characterized by the thought that “we're screwed,” and the question of “why are we thinking about these superficial issues when we're so utterly screwed on such a fundamental level?” I have wondered whether or not other people feel the same, and whether they're hiding it – whether people actually think that progressive solutions exist, or whether they're simply indulging themselves with ridiculous thought experiments having acknowledged beforehand that they're essentially useless. It seems as if the professor said, on the first day of class: “OK, everybody, we're going to assume that the sky is purple, and spend the rest of our class sessions coming up with ideas with this assumption in mind,” and for some reason or another, all of the other students at some point forgot that we're just pretending.

The reason I had trouble coming up with a topic about which I felt any passion is that I was looking for one that involved the assumption that the sky is purple, which would mean accepting that the common mental framework by which we approach environmental problem-solving is valid or effective – something I was not able to do. I have always associated environmentalism with optimism and with hope, but when I personally consider the subject, I don't have much of either. It has always seemed naïve to me to think that baby steps, technological innovation, minor changes of lifestyle, or letter-writing will solve our problems, but I rarely heard any discussion to the contrary.

At times I have been tempted to go along – to consider recycling a serious solution to problems of waste, for example, or to ponder how we ought to change cars in order to eliminate their harmful effects – but I can never pretend for long that I think these approaches are legitimate, nor can I maintain faith in our ability to overcome environmental issues through conventional means.

My favorite environmental philosopher, Derrick Jensen, has written on hope:

Hope is a longing for a future condition over which you have no agency... I'm not, for example, going to say I hope I eat something tomorrow. I just will. I don't hope I take another breath right now, nor that I finish writing this sentence. I just do them. On the other hand, I do hope that the next time I get on a plane, it doesn't crash. To hope for some result means you have given up any agency concerning it. Many people say they hope the dominant culture stops destroying the world. By saying that, they've assumed that the destruction will continue, at least in the short term, and they've stepped away from their own ability to participate in stopping it... I do not hope coho salmon survive. I will do whatever it takes to make sure the dominant culture doesn't drive them extinct.¹

¹ Jensen, Derrick. "Beyond Hope." *Orion Magazine*. May/June 2006

In giving up hope we accept responsibility for the future of the earth, and when we accept responsibility, we begin to act. This thesis is about a direct-action environmentalist movement known by a variety of unofficial names, such as monkey wrenching, eco-terrorism, and ecotage.² The movement is centered around the sabotage of any sort of human industrial operation that causes significant harm to the earth. In almost all conceivable cases, this sort of sabotage is illegal, but whether it is morally acceptable is a much more interesting question. In the following pages, in addition to providing an historical and philosophical background of ecotage, I will explore this question of its morality.

As a starting point, I've created a simple, five step argument for my view on humanity's environmental responsibility. The first four steps are premises upon which I will elaborate to some degree over the course of this paper, and the fifth step is a conclusion that should necessarily follow from the premises if they are true.

- 1) Humans are currently threatening the earth's viability as a habitat for living thing.
- 2) Humans have a duty not to threaten the earth's viability as a habitat for living things.
- 3) Our duty not to threaten the viability of the earth as a habitat for living things is stronger than our duty to obey the law.
- 4) The exclusive use of traditional, legal attempts to change

² I'll include an analysis of the various names when I discuss its history.

patterns of human behavior to eliminate their threat to the earth's viability as a habitat for living things is and will always be ineffective.

5) Therefore, when our duty not to threaten the earth's viability as a habitat for living things conflicts with our duty to obey the law, we ought first to satisfy the former.

A logician may implore me to reformulate or include some intermediate steps to tighten my logic, but I feel that the major points of contention in my argument are all contained within the version above, and I feel that its accessibility as stated is worth a small amount of imprecision. The point of this thesis is not to defend extensively every one of my premises, for to do so would be far too ambitious and multi-disciplinary. Notably, I can't expect to prove here that human activity is currently imperiling our planet – the issue is simply too complicated. In fact, I don't intend to properly defend any of the premises I have asserted above. I'll do so partially, but the extent of my goal is to *remind* you that they are true, not to convince you. If you don't already believe that the earth is threatened, then I couldn't convince you, in any event. Similarly, if you believe that we have a higher obligation to the law than to the planet, it is not within my ability to convince you otherwise. This thesis is written for those who already believe that each of those premises above are true, but who don't know what to do with that information. For those who have not been exposed to the ecotage movement I will provide historical context; for those who don't understand how it works I will give specific examples; and

for those who ask why I will discuss motives – philosophical and otherwise. The legality and social context of the movement have kept it out of real consideration both in academia and in general discourse, but I believe that it needs to be discussed seriously, because to me ecotage is the logical consequence of the beliefs that the earth is too valuable to lose and that we're losing it, with an acknowledgment that our efforts up to this point have been disastrously slow-working (when they work at all).

History

“Always pull up survey stakes. Anywhere you find them. Always. That's the first goddamned general order in this monkey wrench business. Always pull up survey stakes.” -George Hayduke

Sabotage: from the French: *sabot* – a particular kind of wooden clog that was either thrown by disgruntled, protesting Luddite workers into the gears of newly invented mechanical looms; or that was simply a clumsy, noisy piece of footwear that resulted in bungled work. Definite etymology unknown.³

Terms

A variety of terms apply to the environmentally motivated sabotage with which I will deal in this paper. The leading three in popularity are monkey wrenching, eco-terrorism, and ecotage, of which I favor the third. The first term is used primarily by the environmental defenders themselves, and its origin is a literary reference and a metaphor – it was coined by Edward Abbey in 1975 in his famous novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and it refers to the symbolic image of throwing a monkey wrench into the turning gears of a machine to stop it. The consequent informality of the term dissuades me from using it. It carries no linguistic reference to the act to which it refers; rather, it seems to be merely slang. The second term is more precise, but it is undeniably partial politically. While members of radical environmental organizations clearly intend to achieve political ends through instilling terror, terrorism implies the use or threat of violence against people. Some definitions of terrorism include this implication, while others do not, but in recent years, especially after the September 11th attacks, the word “terrorism” has become

³ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sabotage>

extremely charged, and so despite the linguistic simplicity of the term, it carries a heavier connotation than is suitable for application to so-called “eco-terrorists,” who universally avoid harming or threatening to harm life as an explicit rule. The last term seems to avoid the pitfalls of the first two: its origins are purely linguistic, and it carries no complicating connotations. Ecotage simply refers to environment-based sabotage. While I suppose this could refer to acts of sabotage against the environment, in this paper I will use the term ecotage to refer to acts of sabotage in defense of the environment. Additionally, I will sometimes refer to those who commit ecotage as ecoteurs.

Organized Environmentalism: the Roots of Radicals

The sort of radical environmentalism associated with ecotage has its roots – philosophical and chronological – buried in the more mainstream environmental movement, but importantly, ecotage stems from the emergence of discontent with that mainstream movement. Since the late 19th century, the trend in the development of environmental organizations has been towards increased radicalness. David Brower describes the chronology of the movement in part:

The Sierra Club made the Nature Conservancy look reasonable. I founded Friends of the Earth to make the Sierra Club look reasonable. Then I founded Earth Island Institute to make Friends of the Earth look reasonable. Earth First! now makes us look reasonable. We're still

waiting for someone to come along and make Earth First!

look reasonable.⁴

In 1892, dissatisfied with the 19th century conservation movement and interested in promoting preservation – deeming certain areas off-limits for development – John Muir founded the Sierra Club as an environmental advocacy organization. Its mission is as follows:

To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth;

To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's

ecosystems and resources; To educate and enlist humanity

to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human

environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these

objectives.⁵

Similarly, in 1935 Aldo Leopold co-founded the Wilderness Society, another preservationist organization that, like Muir's Sierra Club, relied on the belief that wilderness has value beyond its resource utility to humans. Part of its founding mission stated:

⁴ Liddick, Donald R. *Eco-Terrorism: Radical Environmentalism and Animal Liberation*. Praeger Publishers Westport, CT. 1993. pg 63. At the time of Brower's claim, the Earth Liberation Front had not been established. They would soon come along and indeed make Earth First! look moderate by comparison.

⁵ "Mission Statement." *Sierra Club*. <http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/>

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.⁶

These two organizations, especially the Sierra Club, grew to become, and probably still are, the most powerful legal advocates for the environment. They have been instrumental in the passage of various environmental ordinances, including the Wilderness Act of 1964, which was authored by the Wilderness Society, and resulted in the protection of over nine million acres of wilderness. The Sierra Club, for its part, stopped the construction of the Echo Park Dam in Dinosaur National Monument in 1956, and its opposition of the construction of Glen Canyon Dam, though unsuccessful, garnered tremendous support and helped strengthen a national community of environmental advocates.⁷ As significant as these victories seemed, however, they were the results of compromises, and they paled in comparison to the honest demands of environmentalists. These organizations could claim minor victories, but they were losing ground faster than they were saving it.

As the organizations grew, so did their need to moderate themselves to satisfy their less-radical constituents. Consequently, discontent emerged from within,

⁶ "About Us," *The Wilderness Society*. <http://wilderness.org/about-us/history>

⁷ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 14.

specifically from those who felt that moderation was unacceptable. David Brower, former head of the Sierra Club, founded Friends of the Earth in 1969 after the Sierra Club refused to oppose the construction of nuclear plants. Greenpeace was founded in 1972 on the heels of the protest of underwater nuclear testing near Alaska's Aleutian Islands by a relatively unorganized group of activists called the “Don't Make a Wave Committee.” When the protest gained publicity and popularity, and after a major legal victory resulting in the designation of the testing site as a bird sanctuary, the committee disbanded and reformulated as the more official Greenpeace.⁸

While some argue that “Greenpeace cannot be fairly labeled as 'mainstream,’” “radicals hold firm in their belief that no *organization*, replete with hierarchy and defined leadership, can be flexible and dynamic enough to act quickly and in the best interests of the environment,” and so Greenpeace's size, policies, and organizational structure necessitate that it be categorized alongside compromise-based, policy-focused groups like the Sierra Club.⁹ It can be agreed, however, that Greenpeace has served, as author Rik Scarce puts it, as a “tactical and philosophical bridge between straight-laced old line environmentalism and the no-holds-barred radicals.”¹⁰ To their credit, as radicals view them, they do “have more of a deep ecology vision than most of the other mainstream environmental groups,” which justifies the claim that they serve as a philosophical transition from mainstream to radical environmentalism.¹¹ Tactically, they do not advocate sabotage, because the organization is strictly non-violent, and “for Greenpeace,

⁸ Ibid. 14-16

⁹ Scarce, Rik. *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*. Left Coast Press. California. 1990. 51 and 52.

¹⁰ Ibid. 51.

¹¹ Ibid. I'll elaborate on deep ecology in the next section of this paper.

property destruction is violence, plain and simple”; however, they are “willing to break the law and do civil disobedience.”¹² That is, they restrict their illegal, direct-action efforts to interference and confrontation.

Though the organization is non-violent, Greenpeace has been on the receiving end of violent attacks. To cite just one example, in 1985, while protesting nuclear testing off the coast of Australia, Greenpeace's “Rainbow Warrior” vessel was sunk by a French military ship, killing a photographer on board.¹³

In 1977, after Paul Watson was expelled from Greenpeace for reportedly throwing a seal hunter's club into the water in a violation of the organization's non-violence rule, he founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, an organization that opposes and directly combats illegal whaling. Unlike Greenpeace, the Sea Shepherds do not restrict themselves to non-destruction; rather, the sinking of ships is a main component of their campaign.¹⁴ The group is able to maintain a high public profile while engaging in violent opposition because they only target ships that are already engaging in illegal activities, which means the prosecution of Watson and his crew would result in the discovery of the violation of international whaling regulations. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society serves as an example of the transition from non-destructive environmentalism to ecotage.

The Move to Radical Environmentalism, and Earth First!

As one might expect, the origins of of sabotage-based radical environmentalism

¹² Ibid. 51.

¹³ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 16.

¹⁴ “The History of Sea Shepherd Conservation and Whaling.” *Sea Shepherd Conservation Society*. <http://www.seashepherd.org/whales/sea-shepherd-history.html>

cannot be traced in their entirety through the chronology of organizations. Much of the movement within organizations toward radicalism was the result of external influence. In particular, Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* played a major role in the popularization of radical environmentalism for at least two reasons. First, it made public the concept of ecotage (or as he called it, monkey wrenching), and gave examples of various types: billboard cutting, sabotage of construction equipment, pulling up survey stakes, etc. The acts in his are intentionally described in such specific detail that the novel begins to read like a how-to guide.

When everything was cut that they could reach and cut,
Hayduke pulled the dipstick from the engine block – to
check the oil? Not exactly – and poured a handful of
fine sand into the crankcase. Too slow. He unscrewed the
oil-filler cap, took a chisel and hammer and punched a hole
through the oil strainer and poured in more sand. Smith
removed the fuel-tank cap and emptied four quart bottles of
sweet Karo syrup into the fuel tank. Injected into the
cylinders, that sugar would form a solid coat of carbon on
cylinder walls and piston rings. The engine should seize up
lick a block of iron, when they got it running. If they could
get it running.¹⁵

¹⁵ Abbey, Edward. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Harper Collins. USA. 1975. Pg 86.

The second major effect that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* had was the disassociation of environmentalism from a unified popular image. Each main character in the story is radically different from the others – Hayduke, a beer-guzzling veteran; Bonnie, a young, pot-smoking feminist; Seldom, a polygamist Mormon; and Doc Sarvis, a surgeon – yet they share a common philosophy when it comes to environmental activism. The diversity of these characters meant that no longer was environmentalism necessarily associated with vegetarianism, liberalism, anti-littering, and the Sierra Club. In fact, Abbey intentionally trivializes certain approaches like these to environmentalism to bring attention to what he considers important: the preservation of wilderness against encroaching civilization. Accordingly, the main characters frequently litter, eat red meat, smoke, drive, and criticize so-called environmental organizations (like the Sierra Club, which they consider hugely ineffective) while finding and fighting what they consider the true battles against the real criminals in the best way they know how: by stopping them through the use of force. Their distaste for the Sierra Club image coupled with their obvious status as warriors for the environment breaks down the perceived necessity of the former in order to be the latter. When Bonny Abzug asks George Hayduke, her partner in crime, but her polar opposite in character, how (not why) he intends to bring about a counter-culture revolution, he pauses and thinks long and hard before speaking an idea that every one of the monkey wrench gang would subscribe to, using words that none of them would use: “My job is to save the fucking wilderness. I don't know anything else worth saving. That's simple, right?”¹⁶

In conjunction with the arrival of Abbey's book, about which Rik Scarce writes

¹⁶ Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. 229.

that it “must have bordered on the religious in significance,”¹⁷ the first truly radical, ecotage-based environmentalist groups emerged in the early 1970's alongside the anti-Vietnam war movement and the first Earth Day. These organizations were primarily single-cause-oriented. The Black Mesa Defense, for example, an eco-anarchist group organized by Jack Loeffler, used sabotage in support of Navajo Indians opposing a coal strip-mining project on their reservation.¹⁸ Single-cause organizations like these faded after only a few years, however, as their particular battles came and went. The emergence of such organizations also slowed in the mid 1970's, possibly in response to the United Nations' Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972: a major international recognition of the environmental crisis that seemed to suggest to many environmentalists that the most effective battlefield for environmental defense was mainstream politics.¹⁹

Dave Foreman, co-founder of Earth First!, and author of *Ecodefense* (1985), a manifesto for the practice of ecotage, was one of these hopeful environmentalists working in mainstream politics. As the Southwest Regional Representative as well as the Director of Wilderness Affairs for the Wilderness Society between 1973 and 1980, he worked to develop and lobby for congressional bills intended to preserve wilderness areas. “I discovered that compromise seemed to work best,” said Foreman. “A suit and tie gained access to regional heads of the U.S. Forest Service and to members of Congress. We learned to moderate our opinions along with our dress.”²⁰

¹⁷ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 58.

¹⁸ Foreman, Dave. *Confessions of an Eco-warrior*. Harmony Books, New York. Pg 18.

¹⁹ Ibid. 12.

²⁰ Ibid.

As members and supporters of legitimate political organizations, environmentalists focused on legal opposition to ecologically harmful industrial activities. Part of this legal opposition consisted of compromise. Rather than fight losing battles for what they actually wanted, they attempted to increase their chances of political victory by weakening their demands.

The second and more lasting wave of radical environmentalism arose as environmentalists found that their attempts to guide the system from inside were failing, and were doomed to fail. The most important political catalyst that sparked the new radical environmental movement was the controversy over RARE II (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation) in 1979. The conclusion of the review was that of 190 million acres of National Forest, 80 million still roadless, only 15 million were to be given protection from road building and timber cutting.²¹ Environmentalists had hoped for much more than the review granted, especially considering the recent election of supposedly eco-friendly president Jimmy Carter. The conditions were perfect for a monumental decision in favor of the planet over resource exploration and profits, but even the environmentalists' weakened demands were not even close to satisfied. Furthermore, the political situation promised only to worsen. Ronald Reagan, who was expected to oppose nearly all environmentalist demands, was slated for election. Dave Foreman expresses the following about the sentiments of those environmentalists working within the government and mainstream organizations.

Maybe, some of us began to feel, even before Reagan's

²¹ Ibid. 13.

election, it was time for a new joker in the deck: a militant, uncompromising group unafraid to say what needed to be said or back it up with stronger actions than the established organizations were willing to take.²²

In the face of a rapidly worsening political climate, many of those environmentalists decided to turn their backs on politics in search of something more effective, more direct.

“The Earth First! founding members were all former mainstream environmentalists who were fed up with the political system and believed that radical action was necessary to avert the imminent environmental crisis.”²³ Dave Foreman's co-founders included Mike Comola, who had been president of the Montana Wilderness Association; Randall George, Mike Roselle, and Howie Wolke, all formerly of Friends of the Earth; Susan Morgan and Bart Koehler, both formerly of the Wilderness Society; and Ron Kezar, formerly of the Sierra Club. Methodologically, these founders “set out to be radical in style, positions, philosophy, and organization in order to be effective and to avoid the pitfalls of co-option and moderation that [they] had already experienced.”²⁴

At their first meeting in 1980, the founders established the following goals:

- To state honestly the views held by many conservationists.
- To demonstrate that the Sierra Club and its allies were

²² Ibid. 17.

²³ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism* 56.

²⁴ Foreman. *Confessions*. 18-19

raging moderates, believers in the system, and to refute the Reagan/Watt contention that they were “environmental extremists.”

- To balance such antienvironmental radicals as the Grand County Commission and provide a broader spectrum of viewpoints.
- To return vigor, joy, and enthusiasm to the tired, unimaginative environmental movement.
- To keep established groups honest. By stating a pure, no-compromise, pro-Earth position, we felt that Earth First! could keep the other groups from straying too far from their original philosophical base.
- To give an outlet to many hard-line conservationists who were no longer active because of disenchantment with compromise politics and the co-option of environmental organizations.
- To provide a productive fringe, since ideas, creativity, and energy tend to spring up on the edge and later spread to the center.
- To inspire others to carry out activities straight from the pages of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (a novel of environmental sabotage by Edward Abbey), even though

Earth First!, we agreed, would itself be ostensibly law-abiding.

- To help develop a new worldview, a biocentric paradigm, an Earth philosophy. To fight, with uncompromising passion, for Earth.²⁵

“The name Earth First! was chosen because it succinctly summed up the one thing on which we could all agree: that in *any* decision, consideration for the health of the Earth must come first.”²⁶ This sentiment, along with many of the principles given above, is evidence of the responsive nature of Earth First!. The founders were upset with the current order of the environmentalist movement, and they sought to correct it. The established groups were ineffective, their philosophies were either inadequate or not fully respected, and many environmentalists had distanced themselves from the movement for lack of an organization that truly represented their desires. Earth First! was the first major no-compromise group, and as such it created a new and much needed niche in the environmentalist movement.

Earth First! held their first major demonstration in March of 1981. In this infamous case, seventy-five members of the group walked onto the Colorado River Bridge, while five additional members carried a rolled-up 300 foot piece of thin, soft black plastic onto the Glen Canyon Dam just upstream. The five on the dam unfurled the piece of plastic down the face of the structure, creating the illusion of a massive, growing

²⁵ Ibid. 18.

²⁶ Ibid.

crack. Those on the bridge cheered. Edward Abbey gave a speech to the crowd, and country singer Johnny Sagebrush (the alias of Earth First! co-founder Bart Koehler) sang as authorities arrived and attempted to disperse the crowd.

Dave Foreman also spoke to the crowd, introduced Earth First!, and outlined the following principles of the movement:

- A placing of Earth first in all decisions, even ahead of human welfare if necessary.
- A refusal to use human beings as the measure by which to value others.
- An enthusiastic embracing of the philosophy of Deep Ecology or biocentrism.
- A realization that wilderness is the real world.
- A recognition that there are far too many human beings on Earth.
- A questioning of, and even an antipathy to, “progress,” and “technology.”
- A refusal to accept rationality as the only way of thinking.
- A lack of desire to gain credibility or “legitimacy” with the gang of thugs running human civilization.
- An effort to go beyond the tired, worn-out dogmas of left, right, and middle-of-the-road.

- An unwillingness to set any ethnic, class, or political group of humans on a pedestal and make them immune from questioning.
- A willingness to let our actions set the finer points of our philosophy and a recognition that we must act
- An acknowledgment that we must change our personal lifestyles to make them more harmonious with natural diversity.
- A commitment to maintaining a sense of humor, and a joy in living.
- An awareness that we are animals.
- An acceptance of monkey wrenching as a legitimate tool for the preservation of natural diversity.
- And finally: Earth First! is a warrior society²⁷

Foreman later elaborated upon each of these principles in a new informational periodical called *The Earth First! Newsletter* (later renamed *The Earth First! Journal*). The newsletter was aimed at recruitment, and it gave details both on projects that were currently being opposed by Earth First! members, as well as projects that needed opposition. In other words, part of the newsletter was dedicated to highlighting the recent actions of members, while another part was dedicated to calling for action. The periodical also contained some condemnation of various industries, companies, individuals, and

²⁷ Ibid. 26-34.

actions, as well as justifications of ecotage.

In 1985, he followed up with a full declaration when he published *Ecodefense*, a manual for ecotage. The book contains explicit instructions on how to commit various acts of sabotage, and includes firsthand field notes from experienced saboteurs. Foreman offers little justification for ecotage in the manual; instead, the book mainly serves an instructional role for those who are already convinced that ecotage is a legitimate undertaking. *Ecodefense* is largely collaborative, including many pieces from *The Earth First! Journal*, and many pieces written by guest contributors. Foreman's inspiration for the book may be partially traced to Sam Love's 1972 book, *Ecotage!*, which describes various forms of sabotage, largely centered around an anonymous Chicago saboteur called "The Fox," who was known for plugging smokestacks and throwing sewage onto executives of environmentally irresponsible businesses.²⁸

Despite Foreman's encouragement, Earth First! Was not concerned only with ecotage; the group also engaged in more traditional acts of civil disobedience. In 1985, Mike Jakubal of Earth First! conducted the first "tree sit" on (or above) American soil.²⁹ In response to the imminent logging of an old growth section of Willamette National Forest, Jakubel climbed into a massive Douglas Fir tree, hoping that the loggers wouldn't cut down the tree in which he sat. Over the course of the next day, a huge section of forest around Jakubel was cut, though the loggers did leave his tree standing. That night,

²⁸ "Environmental Activists" *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*
<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/300038.html>

²⁹ Huber, Ron. "Earth First!'s First Tree Sitting Civil Disobedience Action."
http://www.penbay.org/ef/treesit_first1985.html

upon descending to inspect the damage, Jakubel was arrested, and the tree in which he had been sitting was cut the next day.

These individual actions increased over the course of the 1980's, and Earth First! members were responsible for a variety of acts, destructive and non-destructive, ranging from tree-spikings, to the arson of a wood chipping factory, to severing power lines.³⁰ The group's association with illegal activities was sketchy. As set forth in their founding principles, Earth First! intended from its inception not to engage in any illegal activities, but rather simply to encourage unassociated individuals to do so. Strictly speaking they have been true to this plan. While Earth First! members have committed illegal acts, and while the group has condoned, even called for such acts, Earth First!'s funding has only been used for legitimate enterprises, like the publication of the journal. Accordingly, though their associations have earned them incessant scrutinization by law enforcement agencies, they have remained legally clean.³¹

The Earth First! movement rapidly gained popularity as disheartened environmentalists flocked to the only group that seemed not to compromise. Numbers are difficult to come by, since Earth First! has no official membership, but chapters of the organization sprung up in more and more cities across the country and countries across the world. As mentioned earlier, Earth First! was founded partially as a preemptive response to the election of eco-unfriendly president Ronald Reagan, and sure enough, once in office, his actions helped drive environmentalists towards radicalness. The new

³⁰ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 58.

³¹ Foreman. *Confessions*. 20.

president appointed James Watt – who environmentalists affectionately nicknamed “Rape 'n' Ruin” – to the position of Secretary of the Interior, as well as various corporate executives to important land management positions. Reagan and his cabinet predictably pushed “regulations that benefited business over the environment.”³² Environmental protection deteriorated, but grassroots environmentalism grew.

Increasing numbers resulted in greater visibility and political leverage; however, as was the case with many earlier groups, size meant ideological division. While all Earth First! members supported direct action, many new members, drawn to Earth First! for the vigor with which they opposed environmental destruction, arrived also carrying Gandhian policies of non-violence, and accordingly opposed destruction in favor of symbolic actions. That is, they supported tree sitting as opposed to tree-spiking. Foreman wrote in 1991:

From the beginning, the Earth First! movement has had three major strains: monkey wrenching; biocentrism and ecological wilderness preservation/restoration; and confrontational direct action, both legal (demonstrations) and illegal (civil disobedience). Different personalities have been attracted to Earth First! by each of these strains. Those given to better exploiting the monkey wrenching, direct action, and conservation biology niches have lately

³² Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 15.

been diverging.³³

Additionally, the growing youth faction of Earth First! brought with it anarchist-influenced philosophy, which alienated many of the older members, who were products of the conservation movement rather than social rebels looking to attach themselves to a cause.³⁴ Just as the Sierra Club eventually disassociated themselves from tougher issues (like nuclear plants), in the late 1980's and early 1990's, Earth First! began to waver on the issue of destructive direct action. A final ideological rift divided those who believed in the possibility of a future human society existing in harmony with nature from those who believed that all was essentially lost, and that, barring massive population reduction, the only realistic aim of preservation was to hang on as long as we can to the last shreds of wilderness.³⁵ The first faction, represented by Dave Foreman, thought that the needs of the environment ought always to be placed before human needs, and the other faction, represented by Earth First! co-founder Mike Roselle, sought to balance the needs of humans and the environment.³⁶ Earth First!, having recently gained significant popularity, predictably opted to take the less radical position – largely abandoning the condoning of destructive tactics, and working toward a sustainable society. In response, in 1990, the more militant faction of the group, following Dave Foreman, departed from Earth First! to pursue ecotage full-time.

³³ Foreman. *Confessions*. 218.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 59

³⁶ Ibid. 60.

Earth Liberation Front

In 1992, an issue of the *Earth First! Journal*, an anonymously written article announced the establishment of the ELF in Brighton, England. A major act of sabotage had brought with it intense publicity and scrutiny, and the pressure caused the British *Earth First!* to crack. The “movement was not ready for it,” a member wrote.³⁷ Accordingly, *Earth First!* re-asserted its status as non-destructive, despite the destructive urges of many of its members. The destructive faction split off, and the Earth Liberation Front was formed.

Shortly thereafter, U.S. *Earth First!* activist Judi Bari wrote in the same periodical: “England *Earth First!* has been taking some necessary steps to separate above ground clandestine activities... If we are serious about our movement in the U.S., we will do the same... It's time to leave the night work to the elves in the woods.”³⁸ The establishment of the American chapter would soon follow, in 1996.

The ELF represents today's most radical faction of environmental activists, and its focus is almost exclusively on covert property destruction and other acts of ecotage. The front page of its own webpage reads: “The ELF realizes the profit motive caused and reinforced by the capitalist society is destroying all life on this planet. The only way, at this point in time, to stop that continued destruction of life is to by any means necessary take the profit motive out of killing.”³⁹

³⁷ Tara the Sea Elf. “The Earth Liberation Front,” *Earth First! Journal* 16:7 (September 21, 1996), pg 18.

³⁸ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 64.

³⁹ “Frequently Asked Questions About the Earth Liberation Front.” *North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office*. http://www.reachoutpub.com/elf_faq_ew.pdf

Structurally, the ELF's deliberate decentralization is modeled after its older sister-organization, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). The organization consists of an unknown number of autonomous cells of around two to five people. Members do not know the members of other cells, and communication between them is impossible.⁴⁰ This structure almost guarantees the security of ELF members, but it also complicates coordination and increases the chances of poorly conceived or executed actions. The only overarching element of the organization is its National Press Office (NAELFPO): a legal, above-ground media outlet that publishes information on the group. By serving only to report upon the philosophies, actions, and plans for future actions of the group without technically associating themselves with any criminal behavior, the organization has managed to stay mainly afloat, though law enforcement agencies have shut it down sporadically.

The ELF is perhaps most infamous for torching several buildings and ski lifts in Vail, Colorado on October 18th, 1998, causing approximately \$26 million in damage. After the crime, the arsonists anonymously communicated the purpose of the arson:

...Vail, Inc. is already the largest ski operation in North America and now wants to expand even further. The 12 miles of roads and 885 acres of clearcuts will ruin the last, best lynx habitat in the state. Putting profits ahead of Colorado's wildlife will not be tolerated. This action is just a warning. We will be back if this greedy corporation

⁴⁰ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 64.

continues to trespass into wild and unroaded areas...”⁴¹

The Elf is also responsible for the most costly act of ecotage ever committed: the arson of a San Diego condominium development on August 1, 2003, estimated at around \$50 million damage. Additional acts committed by the ELF include the gluing of locks at a string of McDonald's restaurants, the arson of several SUV dealerships and other condominium developments, torching construction equipment, and even tree-spiking.⁴²

Backlash

Radical environmentalist groups are considered by the United States government to be the number one domestic terrorist threat.⁴³ Accordingly, they are consistently under intense legal scrutiny. Legal action against sabotage, ecological or otherwise, has historically been fierce, because actions that disrupt economic activity and damage property are not taken lightly, and because, as Donald Liddick writes, in the 1980's, “opposition to the environmental agenda had become highly coordinated, artfully pitting trees and owls against the rights of Americans to earn a living and dispose of their private property as they wished.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, many of the legal developments – the creation and enforcement of laws – surrounding ecotage have been notably harsh, and sometimes *ad hoc*.

The *ad hoc* nature of the legal responses to ecotage can be seen in the manner in

⁴¹ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 66.

⁴² Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism* 65-66.

⁴³ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 268.

⁴⁴ Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism*. 15.

which laws against the practice are passed. Many of the principle anti-ecotage ordinances have been “riders” on other, somewhat unrelated acts. For example, when congress passed the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, as expected, it contained a variety of regulations on drugs, including a section targeted at the ongoing practice of marijuana growing in Oregon forests; however, almost humorously, this section also included laws against spiking trees and logging roads, or any act committed “with the intent to obstruct or harass the harvesting of timber.”⁴⁵ Any such act, not resulting in injury, would be punished by a maximum of one year in prison. Offenses that resulted in minor injury (including bruises and minor cuts), or property damage exceeding \$10,000 dollars, would be punishable by up to ten years in prison. Offenses that resulted in serious injury would be punishable by up to twenty years in prison. Finally, offenses that resulted in death could be punishable by life in prison. Second time offenders of any degree would automatically be punished with a ten-year sentence.⁴⁶

In 1992, largely in response to attacks by animal rights activists associated with the ALF against animal experimentation laboratories, Congress passed the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, which made attacks on animal enterprises a federal offense. If the damage of such a crime exceeded \$10,000, it would be punishable by a year in prison, while acts resulting in serious injury or death could be punishable by ten years or life. In addition to the federal law, 32 states passed laws between 1988 and 1992 specifically

⁴⁵ Foreman, Dave. *Ecodefense*. Chapter 3: tree-spiking: Federal Anti-Spiking Legislation. http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Various_Authors__Ecodefense__A_Field_Guide_to_Monkeywrenching.html

⁴⁶ Ibid.

designed to defend against animal rights saboteurs.⁴⁷ However, since acts of ecotage, which by nature involve property destruction, are already illegal, the most these laws can do is to enhance penalties for specifically environmentally-motivated crimes.

As the top domestic terror threats in the United States, some of the most influential players in the radical environmental movement have been subject to FBI investigation and prosecution.⁴⁸ In May of 1989, Dave Foreman was roused from bed by armed, aggressive FBI agents, who had been investigating him over the course of the preceding year.⁴⁹ Foreman was accused of conspiring to sabotage the power lines running out from several nuclear facilities. The investigation included the infiltration of Earth First! by an FBI agent named Mike Fain, to whom several Earth First!ers confessed various previous crimes and plans for future ones. One night, Fain, having gained the trust of the group, went with two members to take down a power line tower in central Arizona as a test run for the nuclear sabotage project. Halfway into the cutting of the tower, he called in fifty more FBI agents, who captured one of the Earth First!ers on the spot, and the other the next morning, along with Dave Foreman, who had funded the saboteurs.⁵⁰

Not all of the backlash to ecotage has been legal – as mentioned before, various members of Greenpeace and other organizations have been the victims of violent attacks. In one particularly famous case, Earth First! leaders Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney were the targets of a car bombing. Both individuals sustained injury, and Bari remained in the

⁴⁷ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 100.

⁴⁸ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 268.

⁴⁹ Zakin, Susan. *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! and the Environmental Movement*. Viking Penguin, 1993. pgs. 1-2.

⁵⁰ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 86.

hospital for six weeks.⁵¹

The FBI and other law enforcement agencies almost immediately charged Bari and Cherney, claiming that the two were transporting the bomb when it exploded unexpectedly. Later evidence would completely vindicate Bari and Cherney, and additionally cast suspicion on the FBI's own investigation, which seemed to have been hasty at best, but potentially malicious. When “the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, and other mainstream groups requested that the House and Senate judiciary committees in Congress and the California attorney general's office investigate the investigative agencies probing the bombings,” the charges against Bari and Cherney were almost immediately dropped.⁵²

The danger of ecotage lies in the fact that backlash can come from all levels. Since ecotage itself is illegal, harsh and even violent responses are often condoned (or provided) by law enforcement agencies. Ecoteurs have few allies, and their foes are many and powerful. Not to mention the danger inherent in many of the acts themselves. While keeping the perilous nature of ecotage in mind, I will turn now to a description of its various forms of execution, for an account of the specific nature of the practice is imperative to a complete historical and philosophical understanding.

Excerpts from the Manual for Sabotage

The following section will be devoted to the description of several of the most commonly used acts of ecotage. This list is by no means exhaustive; rather, I've

⁵¹ Ibid. 84.

⁵² Ibid. 85.

attempted to provide merely a well-rounded sample, including the most well-known, most practiced, most effective in terms of their ability to prevent environmentally destructive action, and most influential forms of ecotage. There will never be an exhaustive list of acts of ecotage, because the limit of possibilities is equal to the creativity of the saboteurs combined with the specifics of the cases in which they deem intervention necessary. Most of the details regarding these practices come from Dave Foreman's guidebook *Ecodefense*. My purpose for providing these examples is, again, that they are relevant to both the history of the practice and to an understanding of the philosophy of ecoteurs. Historically, the various forms of ecotage I will describe collectively indicate the types of concerns of environmentalists (especially at the time of Foreman's writing), and they also represent the actions to which legal authorities responded. Perhaps more importantly, though, I wish to draw attention to the methodology called for in these acts of ecotage – specifically the emphasis on precautionary measures. Any case in which humans may be at risk is accompanied by a warning and specific instructions on how to avoid harming people. In this regard, I intend Foreman's text to serve as primary source evidence.

Survey Stakes:

In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Edward Abbey's character, George Washington Hayduke, uttered this now-famous line: “Always pull up survey stakes. Anywhere you find them. Always. That's the first goddamned general order in this monkey wrench

business. Always pull up survey stakes.”⁵³ Survey stake removal is one of the easiest acts of ecotage to execute, but it can be one of the most burdensome to the targeted developers. Dave Foreman writes that “accurate surveying is essential for even the most mildly sophisticated construction projects.”⁵⁴ Logging roads, for instance, require extremely precise surveying because hill gradients and curves must be kept manageable for loaded trucks while the route must be as short, fast, and efficient as possible.

Removal of survey stakes on a project – whether a road or a new apartment complex – slows the developers until they can re-survey or at least re-mark the project. Accordingly, diligent stake removal can delay a project indefinitely, or at least until added security makes continued interference impossible. In areas where major construction cannot proceed through the winter months, well-timed stake removal can delay projects for especially long periods of time. The ultimate goal, though, of removing survey stakes, is to interfere with and consequently delay development projects until increased costs outweigh the costs of construction, and the projects are eventually canceled.

Tree-Spiking:

Tree-spiking has become the clichéd act of ecotage because if it is not the most widely used, it has been the most widely publicized. Widespread tree-spiking, popularized by Earth First!, began in the mid 1980's, though the origins of the practice

⁵³ Abbey, Edward. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Lippencott Williams and Wilkins. 1975.

⁵⁴ Foreman. *Ecodefense* Chapter 3: Survey Stakes

date back much farther.⁵⁵ Most spiking has been concentrated in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, though it has also been practiced in New Zealand, Europe, and other regions of the US.⁵⁶

The purpose of tree-spiking is, primarily, to prevent the sale and subsequent cutting of a particular area of forest. The ideal scenario for the tree-spiker is as follows: after a significant number of trees within a defined and desired area (an area up for sale to timber companies) are spiked, the Forest Service is informed, anonymously. The information becomes public, or at least known to any timber companies that may seek to purchase the land for harvesting. Uninterested in dealing with the spiked trees, the timber companies do not bid on the area, leaving the forest intact.

Even if the timber sale goes through, tree-spiking retains a secondary purpose: economic damage. Inevitably, undiscovered spikes will cause damage to the equipment used by timber companies, and so it is in their best interest to spend a certain amount of time, energy, and resources to find and remove the spikes. The timber companies have to decide, then between incurring the financial costs of this extra time, energy, and resource use, or dealing with the financial costs of repairing broken saws in their mills. One way or another, it is thought, enough tree-spiking could cause timber operations – in specific areas, or in general – to become economically inviable.

The practice of tree-spiking has been refined through its widespread use. Each updated edition of Dave Foreman's *Ecodefense* offers new tips and field notes from experienced tree-spikers. Though variations of the practice occur, some generally

⁵⁵ Bari, Judi. "The Secret History of Tree Spiking: Part 2." *Anderson Valley Advertiser*. March 8, 1993. <http://www.iww.org/en/unions/iu120/local-1/EF/JBari12.shtml>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

accepted principles apply to most all cases. In terms of timing, “the earlier the better.”⁵⁷

The ideal time to spike trees is as soon as the sale of an area is announced – which is often decided years in advance. Spiking trees early allows the bark (or moss, or just dirt) to grow back, concealing the nails. Additionally, security is not as much of an issue, whereas law enforcement patrols tend to increase as the sale and cut draw near.⁵⁸

The most common spikes used are 60-penny (or 60D) nails. At 6 ¼ inches, they are the largest “common” nail typically available in bulk at a standard hardware store. The favored hammer is a single-handed sledge, as a typical hammer has too small of a head to be easily and quickly used. Heavy-duty bolt cutters are often used to snap the heads off of the nails after they are driven 90% of the way into the tree. The headless nails are then driven in the rest of the way, and are extremely difficult to remove.

Ideally, spikes are driven into the tree at varying heights, so as to increase the difficulty of detection and removal, but are kept above the range of height in which a chainsaw may come into contact with them. This is a precautionary measure to protect the loggers themselves, and it is not always used. In fact, some tree-spiking intentionally targets chainsaws in an attempt to prevent the trees from being felled. While no injuries have been reported from chainsaw contact with nails, the risk is nonetheless recognized, and most spikers avoid the possibility.⁵⁹

Dave Foreman writes, in support of tree-spiking:

Tree-spiking is an extremely effective method of deterring

⁵⁷ Foreman. *Ecodefense*. Chapter 3: Developments: Tree-Spiking: When to Spike Trees

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

timber sales, which seems to be becoming more and more popular. If enough trees are spiked to roadless areas, eventually the corporate thugs in the timber company boardrooms, along with their corporate lackeys who wear the uniform of the Forest Service, will realize that timber sales in wild areas are going to be prohibitively expensive.⁶⁰

However, the practice is not without its critics – not only in response to the danger of tree-spiking, but in regards to its effectiveness. Judi Bari writes that “successes have been few and far between.”⁶¹ Scores of sections of spiked forest have been sold and cut, despite the spikes, while of the few that were withheld from sale initially – such as a section of the Wenatchee National Forest in Washington state, almost all were cut later.⁶² Bari counters against various examples given by supporters of tree-spiking, citing that in most cases where the spiked forest actually is still standing, such as on Meare's Island, British Columbia, other issues, such as endangered species habitat or Native American rights, are the actual reasons for the forest having been left intact.⁶³

It should also be noted that tree-spiking has resulted in the only ecotage-related injury.⁶⁴ In May of 1987, at a Louisiana-Pacific-operated sawmill in Mendocino County,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Bari, Judi. “The Secret History of tree-spiking – Part 1” *Anderson Valley Advertiser*. February 17, 1993. <http://www.iww.org/en/unions/iu120/local-1/EF/JBari11.shtml>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Specifically, the only case NOT against the saboteur. Environmentalists have been injured and even killed in response to their activism.

California, saw operator George Alexander was nearly fatally wounded when his saw blade hit a spike in a tree. The blade exploded on contact, sending shards of metal flying towards Alexander. He was struck in the face and neck, suffering the loss of twelve teeth, five fractures in his jawbone, and a pierced jugular vein. Fortunately, Alexander survived the incident, which sparked tremendous controversy over the practice of tree-spiking, and undoubtedly contributed to the drafting and passage of the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which criminalized tree-spiking.

As a result, many environmentalists immediately renounced the practice of ecotage. Any act that endangered human life was an unacceptable method of environmental defense, they thought. Some of those who spoke out against tree-spiking had formerly engaged in the practice, and used the incident as justification to cease; others had opposed tree-spiking from the start, and argued that the potential danger of the act had long been known.

Still others, though, recognized the misfortune of the accident, but remained committed to the conception that tree-spiking was an acceptable and necessary act. Dave Foreman of Earth First! wrote, in response to Alexander's injury: "I think it's unfortunate that somebody got hurt, but you know I quite honestly am more concerned about old growth forests, spotted owls, wolverines, and salmon - and nobody is forcing people to cut those trees."⁶⁵ In defense of tree-spiking, much evidence suggested the innocence of Earth First! activists, and incriminated non-activist tree-spikers, as well as the mill itself. For example, after the incident, George Alexander told reporters that he had noted and

⁶⁵ Bari. "Secret History – Part 1."

complained about the fact that the saw blade that eventually exploded was in poor condition. Despite his notification, Alexander's supervisors ordered that the blade continue to be used until a replacement arrived.⁶⁶ So concerned about the state of the blade, Alexander claims that he almost decided not to go to work on the day of the incident.⁶⁷ A blade in good condition almost surely would not have exploded as this one did.⁶⁸

In *Ecodefense*, Dave Foreman claims that in large mills – the sort belonging to the types of companies targeted by tree-spikers – employees are kept safely apart from moving blades, which are operated electronically from behind plexiglass shields. The soundness of this claim, though, is challenged by the incident itself: the mill in which Alexander worked belonged to Louisiana-Pacific, a multi-billion dollar company, and surely the type of major company to which Foreman's claim refers.⁶⁹ As Judi Bari writes, after the incident, Foreman admitted to have never seen the inside of a mill.⁷⁰

An additional human risk in tree-spiking applies to the fellers of the trees. Chainsaws that come into contact with spikes can “kick-back” violently, and though no cases have been reported of broken chains, the risk nonetheless exists. Recognizing this, *Ecodefense* urges tree-spikers to drive their spikes at least ten feet off the ground, where no chainsaw would conceivably be used. If the first case was true – if people were actually consistently well-separated from moving blades in mills – then it would seem that the tactics developed by tree-spiking advocates should, in theory, prevent any harm

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Information accessed from LP's corporate website at www.lpcorp.com.

⁷⁰ Bari. “Secret History – Part 1”

from coming to humans. Further potential for harm, though, could (and has) come from reckless individuals who do not heed the guidelines of experienced spikers.

Though the person who spiked the tree in the case of the Louisiana-Pacific mill has never been found, the details of the spiking itself suggest that Earth First!ers or associated activists were not involved. The spiked tree was a mere 12 inches in diameter – not the sort of old growth targeted by environmentalists. Additionally, residents of the area from which the tree was extracted had previously complained about Louisiana-Pacific's operations in their area. One particular landowner in the area admitted to have spiked his own trees in response to the company frequently cutting several feet past property lines.⁷¹

Power Lines:

Another particularly controversial form of ecotage is the destruction of power lines. The purposes of this form of sabotage are, typically, the prevention the construction of new power lines, the denial of electricity to harmful industries, and the elimination of a threat to migratory bird species.

The manners in which sabotage to power lines can occur are varied. Where noise is not an issue, bullets can be fired at electrical conductors or insulators. Where noise is an issue, or for those without access to guns (or without a desire to use them), ecoteurs can unbolt towers. In case the bolts on the tower are welded in place, a hacksaw or

⁷¹ Ibid.

cutting torch can be applied to the base of the tower. Towers are generally destabilized, but not actually toppled by the saboteurs – to do so would be too risky. Instead, an unbolted or cut tower will be toppled by the first major wind gust. More creative methods are also used. For example, cables can be lifted over the power lines using a harpoon gun or balloon. Once the cable is elevated, it is used to connect directly two conductors – a tricky but effective endeavor, favorable for its lack of necessity for incriminating tools (balloons seem less likely to aid terrorists than metal-cutting torches).

Unfortunately, this form of ecotage is often poorly directed and executed. For example, in 1990, eco-saboteurs destroyed power lines leading to a largely residential area of Santa Cruz, CA, shortly after the area had been hit with a major earthquake. Needless to say, the many affected victims were far from receptive to the environmentalists' concerns.⁷² To prevent incidents like this, Foreman suggests in *Ecodefense* that saboteurs only cut private lines to destructive operations, such as mines.⁷³

Additionally, the danger of power line sabotage – both direct and legal – make it logistically sketchy. The cutting of high tension power lines carries the potential of fatal recoil or electric shock. These sorts of direct risks aren't present in other acts of ecotage, where the biggest danger may be a bruised thumb from a missed hammer strike while driving a nail into a tree. In terms of legality, power lines are such a vital part of industrial infrastructure, and their destruction can affect so many people, that legal

⁷² Foreman. *Ecodefense*. Chapter 3: Powerlines.

⁷³ Ibid.

penalties have the potential to be particularly harsh.⁷⁴ And of course, the fact that bystanders in their homes can be affected creates the potential for counterproductive alienation of the public.

Vehicles:

Sabotage to vehicles is a versatile form of ecotage in that it can be used against a variety of environmentally harmful operations, and it is effective in that most environmentally destructive operations depend on vehicles to some extent. Foreman writes that “large machines, in the form of earth moving and logging equipment and haul trucks, are the most pervasive tools of land rape.”⁷⁵ The two most common major types of vehicle sabotage could be categorized as “manual destruction,” and “introducing certain materials to places they do not belong.” In the first category fall acts like tire-slashing, smashing important machine parts, jamming locks, and cutting tubes and cables. This kind of sabotage is relatively easy and requires very little expertise, but typically does not carry as much potential to do harm as do acts in the second category. As examples of the second type, Foreman writes of a variety of possible instances in which a foreign substance can be introduced to a machine with disastrous results. He claims that the proverbial sugar or Karo syrup in the gas tank is ineffective, and is also unfavorable because it requires the saboteur to carry incriminating evidence. Conveniently, however, water and sand can cripple machinery in a variety of ways without endangering the saboteur. When an abrasive, such as sand, is added to the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Foreman. *Ecodefense* Chapter 5: Vehicles and Heavy Equipment: Heavy Equipment.

lubricating system (meaning: the oil filter hole), and concealed, the machine will continue to run for some amount of time before the engine is irreparably destroyed. Foreman also suggests adding water to the fuel or oil systems, and corrosives or, humorously, instant rice to the radiator.⁷⁶

As with most acts of sabotage explained within *Ecodefense*, vehicle destruction comes with several safety precautions. Foreman advises that the saboteur avoid destroying the battery due to the danger of interacting with electricity and harmful chemicals. Additionally, he warns never to cut brakes, for the safety of the machine operator.⁷⁷

Seismic Operations:

Undiscovered natural resources pose a major threat to wilderness land. Many previously undeveloped areas contain oil or natural gas wells whose exploitation would compromise – if not destroy – the integrity of the landscapes and ecosystems. As an example of the potential danger, “over 90 percent of Bureau of Land Management land in Utah is covered by oil and gas leases.”⁷⁸ The leaseholders have the right to search for resources in their areas, which sometimes entails the construction of forest roads and the introduction of earth-moving equipment, trucks, and helicopters. Inevitably, if oil or natural gas is found, it will be extracted, resulting in even more harm to the wilderness land. As an additional destructive factor, dynamite is commonly used in seismographic exploration. Explosives tend to do little harm to the landscape, but can significantly upset

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Foreman. *Ecodefense* Chapter 3: Seismographic Lines

animal populations, possibly inducing population migration.

Typical methods of sabotage to seismic operations include inserting pins into geophone cables, super-gluing cable heads together, or destroying the central computer or generator unit in a style similar to vehicle sabotage. However, seismic survey crews have varying types of equipment, especially considering the technological advances that have probably altered the process considerably since the last edition of *Ecodefense* described the most effective strategies for sabotage. Accordingly, a standardized process for interference with this sort of operation is difficult to establish. As a general rule, though, acts of sabotage directed at seismic operations are generally most effective when they target expensive, hard-to-replace equipment. Robert Leroy Parker, a guest author in *Ecodefense*, writes that “the cables themselves are not worth so much except one telemetry uses fiber-optic cables, which are hard to repair is chewed by feral donkeys. Or giant rats.”⁷⁹ Aside from targeting expensive equipment, another effective method of sabotage to seismic exploration is to attack large quantities of repetitive equipment, similar in style to the removal of survey stakes. Parker again writes, this time about the intermittent boxes connecting all of the cables to the main computer center, “if about one third of the boxes were dragged off by goddamn wolves or bison and hidden in bushes or holes, this would be enough to stop the crew unless they carry a lot more spares than usual.”⁸⁰

Seismic exploration is expensive, which makes this particular kind of sabotage especially risky. Security guards are common around important equipment, and the legal

⁷⁹ Foreman. *Ecodefense* Chapter 3: Seismographic Lines: Field Notes.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

penalties for interfering with such high-maintenance operations are likely to be severe.

For example, Greenpeace was sued for stopping a seismography boat near Australia.

Billboards:

The toppling of billboards was popularized by Edward Abbey, who goes into almost comically extensive detail about the practice in the opening of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Abbey himself had been taking down billboards since 1958 in New Mexico as an unorganized protest against the erection of the monstrous eyesores in the desert he loved, but it was not until his book was released that the act became popularized.⁸¹ Multiple individuals have been arrested for billboard destruction, and as a result of the practice, many billboards today are constructed using one, thick, functionally indestructible pole instead of more, smaller, more vulnerable poles.⁸²

In Abbey's novel, Doc Sarvis begins by setting fire to a billboard, but later in the novel he and his partners use cutting torches to take down a metal-poled sign. Real-life ecoteurs have wielded axes against wooden structures. While Abbey's description provides extensive details of the cutting, Dave Foreman's *Ecodefense* adds important safety measures regarding the actual felling of the billboards. Illustrations indicate the necessity of staying outside of the dangerous area in front and behind the board in which it will fall, the importance of cutting and felling the sign so that it falls in the direction that the wind pushes it, and the most safe and effective ways to use ropes and cutting implements on the various types of billboard.

⁸¹ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 17.

⁸² Foreman. *Ecodefense*. Chapter 8: Propaganda: Advanced Billboarding.

Philosophy

“Love does not imply pacifism.” -Derrick Jensen

So far I have provided a historical narrative of ecotage. I have presented the chronology of the movement, the specifics of its practice, and the political climate surrounding it. However, this is only part of the purpose of this thesis. Having detailed the history of the practice of ecotage, I will now begin to explore its ethical implications. To do this I will begin by tracing its philosophical roots, and then I will analyze its justification and its role in the environmentalist movement as a whole.

Individual members of groups associated with ecotage typically find their way into the movement through a variety of unique routes, but there are a few common philosophical roots worth discussing. Not all individuals follow these particular philosophies into the practice of ecotage – in fact, various authors have argued that “most eco-warriors have no interest in a well-conceived philosophy or in any other explicit guideposts to tell them how to live their lives.”⁸³ Instead, activists tend to “acknowledge that it is intuition which spurs them to act, not some clear, rational deductive thought process.”⁸⁴ Nonetheless, at least some of the philosophical points I will explore, such as a profound valuation of nature, apply to nearly all radical environmentalists, whether they express it or not. Additionally, the founders and leaders of ecotage-based groups – those in public and inspirational roles who are required to explain and justify their group's efforts – consistently frame their actions in reference to the philosophies I will discuss. In

⁸³ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 32.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

particular, I will discuss deep ecology, ecofeminism, and anarchism, which are three of the most popular gateway philosophies to the practice of ecotage. I will primarily focus on deep ecology, for it is on this philosophy that most justifications of ecotage rely (at least partially). To ecofeminism and anarchism I will make little more than passing references and brief explanations, for though both have lead a substantial number of people towards the practice, both are non-fundamental as justification for ecotage; in fact, both tend to reference deep ecology in their own arguments. Whereas deep ecology has a significant foundational element to it, anarchism and ecofeminism are less philosophies than they are politics, and so in this section, because I seek to uncover the deepest philosophical roots of ecotage, I will stick almost exclusively to deep ecology.

After discussing the major philosophical roots of ecotage, I will turn to an analysis of the practical philosophies expressed by particular groups, and I will attempt to distinguish the ways in which these groups' actions are influenced by the more abstract philosophies. Finally, after attempting to portray the ways in which radical environmentalist groups justify ecotage, I will analyze of the practice, and move towards drawing conclusions about where it ought to fit into the environmentalist movement.

Deep Ecology

Deep ecology was first conceived by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970's, though his ideas were founded in the philosophies of naturalists who preceded him. As Dave Foreman describes it, Naess was “attempting to describe the deeper, more spiritual approach to Nature exemplified in the writings of Rachel Carson

and Aldo Leopold.”⁸⁵ Henry David Thoreau is also commonly credited as one of Naess's major influences, and George Sessions and Bill Devall – in their comprehensive book on deep ecology – spend a chapter exploring various influences and contemporary thinkers. The list includes some expected names, like John Muir, Gary Snyder, Edward Abbey, Paul Ehrlich, Theodore Roszak, and David Brower, but also some unexpected ones, like Martin Heidegger, Aldous Huxley, St. Francis of Assisi, and even Herman Melville.⁸⁶ Many of these writers themselves found inspiration in Eastern religious tradition.

In his first presentation of deep ecology at the 1973 Third World Future Research Conference in Bucharest, Naess identified his philosophy by distinguishing two forms of environmentalism: the “long-range deep ecology movement” and the “shallow ecology movement.”⁸⁷

The short-term, shallow approach stops before the ultimate level of fundamental change, often promoting technological fixes (e.g. recycling, increased automotive efficiency, export-driven monocultural organic agriculture) based on the same consumption-oriented values and methods of the industrial economy. The long-range deep approach involves redesigning our whole systems based on values and methods that truly preserve the ecological and cultural

⁸⁵ Foreman. *Confessions*. 25.

⁸⁶ “Deep Ecology Movement,” *Foundation for Deep Ecology*.
<http://www.deepecology.org/movement.htm>

⁸⁷ Ibid.

diversity of natural systems.⁸⁸

Historically, and to this day, much of the environmentalist movement remains fixed into the category of “shallow ecology.” Problems are framed in terms of single issues, and solutions are framed in terms of dollar amounts and technological innovation; whereas deep ecologists suggest that our problems are intimately interconnected, and that the solutions must be fundamental and consciousness-based. Frustration with this fact has led environmentalists toward a more radical perspective. Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First!, and every one of his co-founders, quit their jobs in the government or with mainstream environmentalist groups and founded an radical group for this reason.⁸⁹

Sessions and Devall express “three main dangers” of short-sighted, narrow-minded, technocratic problem-solving: first is the danger in believing that there is a complete or acceptable solution using modern dominant ideologies and technology;” second is “the presentation of the impression that something is being done when in fact the real problem continues;” and third is the assumption that “there will be new experts who will provide the solution.”⁹⁰ Sessions and Devall insist that these experts will be “constrained by public relations spokespersons for the agenda of profit or power of some corporation or agency.”⁹¹ Thus is “shallow ecology” distinguished from deep ecology, and thus is “shallow ecology” dismissed by the founders and leaders of the deep ecological movement. Shallow Ecological thinking is ineffective in that our problems

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Foreman. *Confessions*. 14-18. More on the philosophy of Earth First! briefly.

⁹⁰ Devall, Bill and Sessions, George. *Deep Ecology*. Peregrine Smith Books. USA, 1985. Pg 196.

⁹¹ Ibid.

require more intricate and fundamental solutions than it can conceive of, and it is dangerous in that it allows us to believe that we are making a difference when we are not.

In further elaborating on deep ecology itself, Sessions and Devall introduce two major premises, and eight central principles to the philosophy. The two premises are “self-realization,” and “biocentric equality.” Self-realization refers to our need to redefine our identities relative to the earth. According to deep ecologists, we must begin to consider ourselves primarily as components of the earth ecosystem, deeply interconnected with each and every other element. As Sessions and Devall point out, the phrase “no one can be saved until we are all saved” applies, but they maintain that in that sentiment we must be able to include all forms of life – down to microbes – for completely adequate re-identification of the self to occur.⁹² An important consequence of this sort of self-realization is a profound increase in respect for non-human life, for if we understand the extent of our dependence on all other organisms, we will recognize that it is in the interest of our own welfare to protect the welfare of non-human beings.

It is here that the second premise, “biocentric equality,” comes in. If we fully realize ourselves as mere components of the earth ecosystem, then because each component of the ecosystem is fundamentally important, none can be said to be more important than another. Accordingly, deep ecologists ask that we consider all other forms of life to be as vital as human life, and equally worthy of consideration in all of our affairs. Importantly, this equalization does not require the diminishing of the absolute value of human life; instead, they ask us to increase the value of non-human life so that

⁹² Devall and Sessions. *Deep Ecology*. 66.

the two are equal.⁹³ Deep ecologists also frequently refer to the concept of “intrinsic value,” and maintain that we ought to assign it to non-human life as well as human life. Just as we see humans to have value beyond their utility – the mentally and physically handicapped are not killed, for example – the non-human world has the same sort of intrinsic value. That is, a salmon has value beyond its capacity to nourish a human, and a tree has value beyond the shade it gives. Accordingly, once we no longer want the shade, we still ought not to cut down the tree. Sessions and Devall argue that, as a consequence of biocentric equality we ought not to compromise non-human (or human) life except to satisfy our vital needs.

It has been argued that biocentric equality is unfeasible because we need to take non-human life (plants count, too) in order to survive. Since this is the case, deep ecologists' suggestion that we value the lives of other organisms to the same extent that we value our own has absurd practical implications. Naess, though, responds that “mutual predation is a fact of life,” and that “in the process of living, all species use each other as food, shelter, etc.”⁹⁴ Accordingly, consumption of other organisms is justified; however, a healthy relationship between predator and prey is different from the abuse and subsequent endangering of a species. The principle of biocentric equality illustrates the stringent requirements of staying on the appropriate side of the distinction.

In addition to these two major premises, Sessions and Devall put forth eight central principles of deep ecology:

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big

and great.

8. *Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.*⁹⁵

These eight principles perform a variety of tasks: they establish a value system, they identify a problem that is the result of deviation from that value system, they assert the necessity of correcting the problem, they give some account of what that correction would consist of, and they obligate the individual to participate in the correcting process. One thing they do not do is give an account of how the individual ought to go about making the required changes. This last bit is what various environmentalists and groups have interpreted for themselves.

Ecofeminism

Though deep ecology has been the most influential philosophical basis for radical environmentalist organizations, various other schools of thought have served as gateways to participation in groups like Earth First!. The eco-feminism movement, which draws on principles of deep ecology to unite the struggles for the ethical treatment of women and the environment, but simultaneously distances itself from deep ecology due to conflicting beliefs, is another major contributor to the growth of Earth First!. Ecofeminists recognize various parallels in the systems of abuse against women and the environment. “These alleged connections provide sometimes competing, sometimes mutually complementary

⁹⁵ Devall and Sessions. *Deep Ecology*. 70. Italics added.

or supportive, analyses of the nature of the twin dominations of women and nature.”⁹⁶ As examples of these sorts of parallels, I will explore the concept of value dualisms and the observed connection – biological and social – of women to the earth.

First, ecofeminists claim that both female and environmental abuse result from “value dualisms. To create value dualisms is to observe things “in disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional (rather than as complementary) and as exclusive (rather than as inclusive).”⁹⁷ These dualisms tend also to include hierarchies, and such is the case with regard to the human-nature and male-female dualisms. Just as nature is considered separate from and less than humanity, women are considered separate from and less than men. Both result in the subjugation and abuse of that which is considered weaker. Ecofeminists would agree that, following the deep ecological principle of biocentric equality, we ought to value equally the various complementary parts of a system, all of which must be healthy for the system to function. Just as men cannot be healthy while women are unhealthy, because while women are unhealthy *humans* cannot be healthy, humans cannot be healthy while nature is unhealthy, because humans and nature are a part of the same whole.⁹⁸

Second, ecofeminists identify a unique biological connection between females and nature, as well as various social constructs that tie them, connotatively, to the earth. The biological connection is seen in women's sensitivity to their environment. For

⁹⁶ Warren, Karen J. “Introduction to Ecofeminism.” *Lilith Gallery*.
<http://www.lilithgallery.com/articles/environmental/Introduction-to-Ecofeminism.html>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

example, women are generally more vulnerable to environmental toxicity than men.⁹⁹

The social constructs can be seen in language and metaphor. While the personification of earth as “mother,” may not seem especially harmful, the terms “virgin timber,” and “rape of the land” begin to illustrate the unity of the subjugation of women and nature.

Additionally, ecofeminists compare the earth to a home, and through considering themselves, as women, to be caretakers of the home, assume a responsibility to respond to any threat they perceive against the earth.

Despite their reliance on the deep ecological principle of biocentric equality, ecofeminists intentionally distinguish themselves in a fundamental sense from deep ecologists by identifying patriarchy, rather than anthropocentrism, as the ultimate source of the ecological crisis.¹⁰⁰ Humanity as a whole overemphasizes masculine values such as rationalism, domination, competitiveness, individualism, and control, while feminine values like egalitarianism, connectedness, and non-aggression are repressed.¹⁰¹ This imbalance between masculinity and femininity, they believe, rather than strict anthropocentrism, is the explanation for the abuse of the natural world.

Anarchism:

Despite the impression that may be received from the increasingly visible new wave of anarchism, radical environmental groups such as Earth First! have always had anarchist tendencies. Edward Abbey once defined anarchy as “the maximum possible

⁹⁹ “Ecofeminism: Women and the Environment,” Feminist Majority Foundation. 2005.
http://www.feministcampus.org/fmla/printable-materials/women_environment.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Warren. “Introduction to Ecofeminism.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

dispersal of power: political power, economic power, and force – military power. An anarchist society would consist of a voluntary association of self-reliant, self-supporting, autonomous communities,” a definition that “most of the [old-school members] of Earth First! would subscribe to.”¹⁰² Within Earth First!, those with more significantly anarchist tendencies have served the “role of internal critics,” constantly questioning organizational structure and policy.¹⁰³

Admittedly, though, anarchism has recently become increasingly popular as a philosophical gateway to ecotage, especially among younger radicals. Notably, anarchist environmental activists made their presence known in the 1999 WTO riots in Seattle. Among the 50,000-100,000 protesters, the “Black Bloc” (or Block) distinguished themselves as the most violent and vocal group – the ones who made the front page of newspapers – by destroying property and fiercely defending themselves against police. “Fuck shit up!,” they chanted as they smashed the windows of major corporations and threw tear gas cannisters back at riot squads.¹⁰⁴ These young radicals were protesting the unethical practices World Trade Organization, about which a watchdog group writes:

The WTO [functions] principally to pry open markets for the benefit of transnational corporations at the expense of national and local economies; workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, women, and other social groups; health and safety;

¹⁰² Abbey, Edward. “A Response to Schmookler on Anarchy,” *Earth First! Journal*. 6:7 August 1, 1986. pg 22 and Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 87-8

¹⁰³ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 89

¹⁰⁴ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 271-2

the environment; and animal welfare. In addition, the WTO system, rules, and procedures are undemocratic, un-transparent and nonaccountable, and have operated to marginalize the majority of the world's people.¹⁰⁵

The protesters rallied against the WTO because the organization's fundamental mode of operation was deemed to be in opposition to environmental (and social) sustainability. Accordingly, rather than seek to change the WTO and other like-minded organizations, which would assume the possibility of achieving sustainability, the anarchists seek to bring them down. Anarchist opposition to the WTO in particular serves to illustrate their general philosophy. Their major justifying premise can be summarized by writer Derrick Jensen: “Civilization is not and can never be sustainable. This is especially true for industrial civilization.”¹⁰⁶ Imperative to an understanding of this premise is an understanding of their definition of civilization, which may seem to refer to all humans, but to them refers to a very specific kind of society. Jensen argues that civilization is:

...a culture—that is, a complex of stories, institutions, and artifacts— that both leads to and emerges from the growth of cities (civilization, see civil: from civis, meaning citizen,

¹⁰⁵ “World Trade Organization,” *Public Citizen*. www.citizen.org/trade/wto

¹⁰⁶ Jensen, Derrick. *Endgame. Volume I: The Problem of Civilization*. Seven Stories Press. New York. 2006. Pg xi

from Latin *civitatis*, meaning city-state), with cities being defined—so as to distinguish them from camps, villages, and so on—as people living more or less permanently in one place in densities high enough to require the routine importation of food and other necessities of life.¹⁰⁷

This definition clearly distinguishes civilization from other forms of human society. For example, tribalism, the sort of society alluded to by Edward Abbey, is notably excluded. By identifying civilization as something more specific than humanity as a whole, anarchists are able to make specific claims about this particular type of society.

Eco-anarchists also espouse a value for the environment similar (or identical) to deep ecologists: that “the needs of the natural world are more important than the needs of the economic system.”¹⁰⁸ Taken in conjunction, these two premises – that civilization is not compatible with a healthy planet, and that the health of the planet is primary – lead anarchists to argue that civilization must be eliminated.

The anarchist movement suffers from the effects of its own image. An anarchist society, it is popularly thought, would consist of “chaos and violence,” whereas the real anarchist concept of the future is much more developed and mature.¹⁰⁹ They envision “a

¹⁰⁷ Jensen, Derrick. “Civilization.” *Endgame*. <http://www.endgamethebook.org/Excerpts/3-Civilization.htm>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 88.

voluntary association of self-reliant, self-supporting, autonomous communities.”¹¹⁰ The specifics regarding how such a society would look are, for obvious reasons, vague, and also varied. Some anarchist thinkers envision a return to pre-industrial, Native American-esque tribalism, while others, notably including author Daniel Quinn, reject the possibility of moving backward, and suggest that we will inevitably move forward, “beyond civilization” into a “new tribalism.”

The Philosophical Basis for Ecotage:

Each of these three philosophies – deep ecology, ecofeminism, and anarchism – consists of the identification of a problem and an assertion that the problem needs to be fixed. None of them give specific instructions on how we ought to do so. The following section will be devoted to attempting to uncover the justification of ecotage based on the philosophies just explored, especially deep ecology.

As is specifically noted in his book, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, Dave Foreman's argument in defense of ecotage builds on principles of deep ecology.¹¹¹ Technically, Foreman's philosophy is an ethics, while Naess puts forth, primarily, a cosmology. In other words, Foreman is primarily concerned with discussing right action (Foreman, at the inception of Earth First!, demanded the group “let our actions set the finer points of our philosophy”¹¹²), while Naess is primarily concerned with discussing how the world works. Both authors cross the line from one side to the other – Foreman

¹¹⁰ Abbey “A Response to Schmookler on Anarchy.”

¹¹¹ Foreman. *Confessions*. 26

¹¹² Ibid. 25.

makes abstract philosophical claims not attributable to Naess and Naess makes ethical suggestions – but for the most part the two play complementary roles in justifying ecotage, for any instructive philosophy needs both a cosmology and an ethics. Without an explanation of the way the world works, an ethical system has no justification, and without a system of application, a cosmology becomes useless musing.

While ecotage does not seem to be necessarily implied in deep ecology – that is, though it is definitely not the only (and probably not the most popular) practical application of Naess's philosophy – Foreman's defense of the practice does seem well-founded in the less-controversial cosmology. He makes use of Naess's principle of self-realization as a part of the natural world. It follows, he suggests, that defense of the earth is defense of ourselves. “When we fully identify with a wild place, then, monkey wrenching becomes self-defense, which is a fundamental right.”¹¹³ In the prologue to Foreman's *Ecodefense*, Edward Abbey elaborates on this point in an extended metaphor comparing the assault on the earth to a burglary of the reader's house. In the case of a burglary, “the householder has both the right and obligation to defend himself, his family and his property by whatever means are necessary. This right and this obligation is universally recognized, justified, and even praised by all civilized human communities.”¹¹⁴ By following the comparison, it follows that if the earth – our home – is threatened, we have the right and the obligation to defend it using any means necessary¹¹⁵.

¹¹³ Ibid. 140.

¹¹⁴ Abbey, Edward. “Foreward!” in Foreman's *Ecodefense*. Prologue.

¹¹⁵ Ecofeminists, who heavily emphasize the parallel of the earth and the home – an important unification, for as women, they identify themselves as keepers of the home – could have written Abbey's metaphor

Having demonstrated that if the earth is threatened then we must use “whatever means are necessary” to eliminate the threat, even if it means sabotage, what is left for Foreman and Abbey to argue is that there really is an assault on the earth that needs defending against (that our home is actually being robbed), and that sabotage is now a necessary means.

The first of these two premises – that the earth really is in danger – is not only intuitive, but a default for environmentalists, but it is an incredibly difficult premise to prove, because the environmental crisis is so multi-faceted and multi-layered. One cannot show that humans are destroying the planet by invoking one contaminated river as an example, but studies of the degradation of the earth as a whole are complex and controversial. Regardless of scientific consensus, popular opinion is nowhere near unanimous that global climate change, or any other sort of environmental crisis, actually exists, let alone poses a dire threat to the planet.

Here is an example to illustrate my point. A few weeks ago my friend showed me a figure that he had pulled from a popular magazine. The figure consisted of a map of the world with each country shaded according to a color scale to indicate the loss or gain in trees over some relatively short span of recent years. The shading indicated a relatively good balance across the globe – that is, the countries in which the number of trees had decreased were balanced out by the countries in which the number of trees had increased. Importantly, the numbers of trees in developed countries (where anyone holding the magazine almost definitely lived) were uniformly stable. The map was designed to induce comfort. “Look,” it seemed to say, “deforestation isn't that bad. In fact, trees are

themselves.

growing back at least as fast as we cut them. The third world is who we ought to be worried about.”

I turned to my friend and said two words: “old growth.” He didn't respond immediately, so I kept going. “Trees are not all the same, and forests are not all equal. My interpretation of this map is that we're cutting down valuable forest – primary forest, even – and planting tree farms. On a year to year basis we may have the same number of trees, or even more, but we're replacing 200 foot Douglas Firs with rows of saplings. Tree farms aren't valuable as habitat; old growth is.” Of course, I had no figures to back this up; no map showing the loss (or increase) of old growth, and no statistics to show how much more diverse and precious primary forest ecosystems are than tree farms. My point was complicated, and my friend had his map. That is not to say that the statistics suggesting drastic environmental degradation don't exist, or aren't strong; it is simply to say that convincing someone that the earth is imperiled cannot be achieved in one conversation. Through exchanges like the one I had with my friend, I have come to understand the reason why “most eco-warriors have no interest in a well-conceived philosophy,” and why “it is intuition which spurs them to act, not some clear, rational, deductive thought process.”¹¹⁶ The belief that the earth is in danger is well-informed, and supported by extensive research and observation by elite minds the world over; however, it is not deduced: there is no easy, four-step argument showing that it is true. Thus, given the magnitude of the claim, it remains a hugely controversial assumption, which is not good for philosophical argumentation. Nonetheless, to many it remains intuitive, even obviously true.

¹¹⁶ Scarce. *Eco-Warriors*. 31.

Those who believe are left with one step in justifying ecotage: that destruction really is an effective and necessary means. In order to explore this question, I will give the view of Tim Dechristopher, a skeptic, and then attempt to defend the position of those in support of ecotage.

Interview with a Saboteur, and an Analysis of the Effectiveness of Ecotage

On December 19, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah, Tim Dechristopher attended an auction for oil and natural gas leases on federal lands. Environmentalist organizations had long been protesting the auction because the leases sold would lead to resource exploration in controversial wilderness areas near Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, plus Dinosaur National Monument and Nine Mile Canyon. Despite their protests, the auction was carried out as planned, until, that is, it was disrupted by Dechristopher, who began to bid on land parcels. Authorities quickly identified Dechristopher as a fraudulent bidder and escorted him away from the auction, but not before he was able to inflate prices drastically in some cases, which caused some oil companies to spend much more than they would have otherwise spent on certain parcels, and in other cases to force other companies out of the bidding entirely. He eventually purchased 22,500 acres in 16 parcels worth a total of \$1.7 million.¹¹⁷ According to Kent Hoffman, deputy state director for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in Utah, "[He] tainted the entire auction."¹¹⁸ Dechristopher is currently on trial for disruption of a government oil and gas auction. He

¹¹⁷ Foy, Paul. "Tim Dechristopher Throws Utah Oil and Gas Drilling Leases Auction into Chaos," *Huffington Post*. December 19, 2008. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/21/tim-dechristopher-throws-_n_152661.html

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

faces a maximum penalty of ten years in prison and a \$750,000 fine. The three-times delayed trial is now scheduled for February of 2011.

On November 9th, 2010, I had a chance to speak to Dechristopher over the phone. My intent going into the interview was to draw parallels between his actions and those of the original monkey wrenchers – Foreman, Abbey, Abbey's fictional characters, etc. – as well as the more modern Earth First!ers and Elves (ELF members). Dechristopher broke the law to impede directly an auction that he deemed environmentally destructive, just as tree-splitters split trees to impede directly the environmentally destructive harvesting of old growth forest.

He, however, was quick to emphasize the differences between his actions and his philosophy and those of the Earth First! founder: “Dave Foreman will be the first to tell you, he doesn't care about people. He is interested in coyotes and mountainsides. I'm motivated by defending humans. I see a huge value in nature and a huge value in animals because of what they offer to human beings.” His response surprised me. Every philosophy I have found underlying acts of ecotage has been characterized by a valuation of nature far above the social standard, and a complementary devaluation of humans, at least relative to nature: deep ecology is primarily concerned with establishing the profound intrinsic value of the earth; ecofeminists similarly assert the real value of nature relative to humans; and anarchists, in recognizing the incompatibility of human civilization and environmental sustainability and subsequently rejecting civilization, implicitly place the value of environmental sustainability higher.

So although Dechristopher interfered with an environmentally destructive oil

auction, his actions were motivated not directly by the threat to Utah wilderness but rather because “human beings are so critically threatened.” Theoretically, then, the cases in which Dave Foreman and Tim Dechristopher would choose to commit sabotage may differ, but considering the self-realization principle of deep ecology – the recognition of not only interdependence, but unity between humans and the environment – their respective efforts to protect nature and human beings ought to be similarly directed. Tim's sabotage of the oil auction may have been out of concern for the well-being of humans, but his actions nonetheless protected nature; Dave Foreman may spike a tree to prevent the destruction of spotted-owl habitat, but his actions nonetheless protect the humans who are dependent on that forest's watershed, the salmon who run up its major river, or the forest's ability to sequester carbon.

Though their efforts may be similarly directed, their manners of execution are profoundly different, and in some senses actually opposed to one another. Dechristopher's explanation of his own philosophy with regard to methods also surprised me. Tim sees himself more as a follower of the Gandhian tradition of civil disobedience than of Foreman's school of sabotage. He makes this choice not out of an obligation to non-destructive means, but rather because he feels that he can be more effective through visible action. While traditional eco-saboteurs – those following the tradition of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Earth First! or the ELF – believe that the most effective way to sabotage is covertly, which allows the saboteur to act continuously, Tim believes in publicly taking credit for acts of sabotage to publicize the efforts of the saboteurs. The publicity that uncredited acts receive is uniformly negative because nobody involved can

defend their actions, and so the only opinions reported are from the offended parties. Dechristopher, by contrast, has turned his crime and subsequent prosecution into a campaign. He has toured the country speaking about his actions and his philosophy, and he has gained minor celebrity status as a result. Nearly everyone who knows his story is on his side, and so he is in a position of political power. As he describes it, the courts have delayed his trial several times because when he is finally tried for his crimes, “there's no way they can come out looking good: either they acquit me, which opens the door for others to do the same as I did, or they send me to prison and they make a sort of martyr out of me.” If Tim is convicted, he believes that the public will think that he is going to jail for a just cause, and that they will sympathize with him while they will be turned against the government and the oil companies that represent his opposition. As he claims: “people aren't moved by an action,” and so rather than try to stop harmful action manually, he intends to inspire people with his story, and to create (or at least help develop) a popular movement. This way, he believes, instead of a series of largely unpublicized acts of destruction alienating the public, publicized acts will attract supporters because when good-intentioned people like Dechristopher are persecuted it appears that those destroying the environment are opposed to the people. When those, like Tim, who are publicly perceived as fighting for a just cause, are punished for doing so, the public will be united against the perceived threat to justice. As he says: “when people put themselves in the way,” and are struck down, “then it starts to look like a war.” Accordingly, Tim's vision is an above-ground popular movement based on civil disobedience and personal sacrifice, and the drawing of attention to the legal persecution

of those acting in accordance with what is just.

At this point I will attempt to respond to Tim Dechristopher, and in doing so draw as close as I can to conclusions regarding acts of ecotage. As Tim says, ecotage has the potential to alienate most people, and if it is going to be a successful defense tactic, many more people need to act than are acting today; however, Jensen writes that “It is a mistake (or more likely, denial) to base our decisions on whether actions arising from them will or won’t frighten fence-sitters, or the mass of Americans.”¹¹⁹ In all likelihood, the legitimacy of ecotage will never gain majority consensus, and because attempting to popularize the movement would require moderation – a non-option for ecoteurs – it seems as if ecotage is fated to remain a fringe movement.

Nonetheless, the question remains: is ecotage necessary? My best answer is this: if we believe that we must do whatever it takes to defend the environment, and if we also believe that legal means are not effective enough, then extralegal means become necessary. Tim Dechristopher believes that legal means are effective, but Derrick Jensen believes that they are not, and so he writes in support of sabotage. He claims that “this culture will not undergo any sort of voluntary transformation to a sane and sustainable way of living,” and that “the longer we wait for civilization to crash – or the longer we wait before we ourselves bring it down – the messier the crash will be.”¹²⁰ Ecoteurs undoubtedly agree, for the act of sabotage implies that whatever one is trying to stop must be stopped manually, directly, and urgently. Their acts of destruction are not the result of hasty impatience, but rather a belief that the picketing, letter-writing, and

¹¹⁹ Jensen. *Endgame: Vol 2: Resistance*. Xii.

¹²⁰ Jensen. *Endgame: Volume 2: Resistance*. Pg x.

speeches inherent in popular movements will always fail, or at least that they will not work in time to prevent environmental catastrophe.

The necessity of ecotage, however, is not entirely based on the ineffectiveness of legal means. To justify ecotage, saboteurs also must show that it works. Dave Foreman and other saboteurs would be quick to provide examples of cases in which tree-spiking protected a particular patch of forest, or cases in which sabotage to construction equipment halted a development project indefinitely, while others would equally quickly provide cases in which it didn't work; however, what is also important to consider are the overall effects of the practice. Though a deliberate lack of media coverage combined with the necessity of covertness of action make it nearly impossible to tell the extent to which the movement has grown, shrunk, or whether or not it has been successful in stopping any development project, it seems not to be unreasonable to say that ecotage has had very little effect, overall. Approximately \$200 million of damage is credited to “eco-terrorists” since the late 1980's.¹²¹ Around \$50 million of that total was caused in a single incident of the torching of a San Diego apartment complex.¹²² The accuracy of this total figure is uncertain, and it is likely incomplete, for acts of ecotage are difficult to track by nature. Still, this number seems particularly tiny, especially when considered in reference to the size of the industries ecoteurs oppose. McDonald's, for example, posted profits of \$4.3 billion in 2008 alone, which is nearly twenty times the amount of recorded economic damage caused by ecoteurs over roughly a fifteen year span.¹²³

Additionally, despite its history, ecotage remains a largely unrecognized

¹²¹ Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism*. 66.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ “McDonald's Posts Sizzling 80% Profit Rise in 2008,” *Breitbart*. January 26, 2010

phenomenon, and its potential for popularization seems dim. Favorable public portrayals of ecotage never seemed to transcend Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and the ever-heightening fervor surrounding terrorism – which has earned its own war – make ecotage seem increasingly unappealing both to the observer and the participant.

Dechristopher left me with a resounding point about Abbey's book: “for the Monkey Wrench Gang, it's not a happy ending. The monkey wrenchers lose. They do something that they feel good about for a while, but the moral is that they ultimately get crushed, and nobody cares.” Of course, he's right. The Monkey Wrench Gang loses, in the end, and they fail to cause a significant amount of damage during the time that they are active. Not only this, but they fail to inspire anyone to follow them. Neither are their actions effective, nor do the ecoteurs convince anyone of their environmental ethics.

Abbey was a supporter and a participant of ecotage, though, which is puzzling. What exactly was he trying to show? The monkey wrenchers save some places from development for brief periods, and they cause temporary frustration to the developers. Is this the only result we can hope to expect? After reading so much of the literature of Earth First!, the ELF, and proponents of their tactics, I was perhaps slightly disappointed with, and definitely skeptical of Dechristopher's point of view. To me, symbolic action just doesn't seem to be powerful enough, and I believe we need to exercise the most powerful forms of resistance that we can possibly muster. Simultaneously, though, the most direct and confrontational form of resistance – sabotage – also seems to lack power. From this stalemate surface two final questions: first, what strategy then, has the most potential to be successful in defending the planet? and second, what, if anything, is the

role of ecotage in the environmentalist movement?

What has the most potential for success is everything. All at once. The protection of the planet is so important and such a difficult task that we must not resolve to use only one method by which to achieve it. We are not restricted to a single battlefield, and so why would we voluntarily choose just one? Moderates and radicals can fight the war on two different levels, and neither must necessarily detract from the other's success. In fact, the two can be mutually supportive. Moderate organizations are more likely to attract new environmentalists (who may even eventually turn to ecotage). Additionally, moderate groups have the ability to fight larger battles than radicals, even though these battles inevitably end in compromise.

Radical groups, for their part, have the ability to widen the space into which mainstream organizations can fit while still being considered moderate. One role of ecotage is, at the very least, to drag the environmentalist movement along behind it – away from old notions of moderation, and away from compromise. David Brower's observation about the chronology of environmentalist organizations implies the continued role of ecotage: to make increasingly radical groups look moderate by comparison. Just as the Sierra Club's standard of moderation gave way to that of the more radical Friends of the Earth thanks to the introduction of the even more radical Earth Island Institute, today's standard of moderation must give way to that of tomorrow, and then tomorrow's must give way to that of the day after, and so on. Ecotage can continue to foster these shifts, even if (and probably because) it is too extreme to become popularized.

That is the purpose of ecotage, if we assume that preventing catastrophe is possible. If it is not – if we have no chance of changing society before it collapses upon itself – then the purpose of ecotage is, as Foreman suggests, to fight for the last beautiful places as long as we can. Consider the following metaphor: a belligerent drunk storms into your house and begins wrecking everything in sight. You believe that you are powerless to stop him, so, understandably, you go stand in front of your china cabinet and allow him to destroy the rest of your things while you protect your most treasured heirlooms. In a matter of time, you believe, he will wear himself out and fall unconscious to the floor. When he does, though most of your things will be destroyed, you will still have your most precious possessions. Or you may not. Historically, ecotage has not provided many success stories. Nonetheless, it seems like we ought to stand in front of the china cabinet, because it might work, and even if it doesn't, it seems justifiable to try. What does not seem justifiable is to stand by and watch as the drunken lout smashes the china.

At the beginning of this paper, I offered a five step argument for the practice of ecotage. Here they are again, to recap:

- 1) Humans are currently threatening the earth's viability as a habitat for living things.
- 2) Humans have a duty not to threaten the earth's viability as a habitat for living things.

- 3) Our duty not to threaten the viability of the earth as a habitat for living things is stronger than our duty to obey the law.
- 4) The exclusive use of traditional, legal attempts to change patterns of human behavior to eliminate their threat to the earth's viability as a habitat for living things is and will always be ineffective.
- 5) Therefore, when our duty not to threaten the earth's viability as a habitat for living things conflicts with our duty to obey the law, we ought first to satisfy the former.

I've briefly explored the first premise in this thesis, and concluded that while it is extremely difficult to prove deductively, it seems quite intuitively true to those who study the environment. The second premise I have explored rather thoroughly: it is the consequence of the deep ecological principle of biocentric equality, is well-argued, and is agreed upon by most environmentalists. The third premise is similar to premise two, but emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing the environment over all other concerns. Again, justification for this premise is found in deep ecology, and it is agreed upon by eco-saboteurs, though not all environmentalists subscribe to it. Those who feel that our obligation to the law is stronger necessarily fail to accept the principle that the environment is primary. The fourth premise is probably the most difficult step of the argument, but it is profoundly important. It is difficult to prove that legal opposition to environmental degradation is ineffective overall – because it has resulted in successes –

but it is important to acknowledge that our continued (and worsening) ecological crisis is evidence that legal opposition has fundamentally failed. Rather than wait to see whether or not it will eventually work, ecoteurs believe it reasonable – imperative, even – to adopt additional, extralegal tactics in the meantime. To return to Abbey's parable of the burglar in your home, it doesn't seem reasonable simply to keep telling the burglar to stop as he approaches you with a knife. Eventually, despite the lack of absolute proof that he is not going to heed your requests and stop, you have the responsibility to pick up a weapon or two of your own and fight back.